

# RECREATION PASSPORT FEE PROVIDES POSITIVE IMPACT TO MICHIGAN'S TOURISM PRODUCT

Many of the crown jewels of Michigan can be found in our State Parks. Michigan's economy is still facing tough economic times with the downturn in the auto industry as well as the continued loss of residents who are leaving the state seeking gainful employment elsewhere. One of the positives that Michigan is fortunate to have is the fact that our tourism product remains constant. Michigan State Parks are a key component of the Michigan brand. When someone mentions "Pure Michigan" they immediately think of light-houses, pristine forestlands, beautiful vistas overlooking legendary trout streams, waterfalls and so much more.

Our investment in Michigan's state parks is one that crosses not only generations past and present but those well into the future. The stewardship that falls upon each and every citizen of the State of Michigan emphatically demands that we preserve the legacy that was left to each one of us. The adoption of **House Bills 4677 and 4678** and concurrent **Senate Bills 388/389** ensures that the future of Michigan's beautiful state parks will be well funded and enjoyed by all of its citizens. The opportunity to continue the investment in Michigan's premiere state park system is one that deserves our utmost attention.

There are a number of points that need to be considered as these bills move toward becoming law.

- These bills, when passed, will provide Michigan with the opportunity to put its best foot forward, whether at a Great Lakes beach or a forest laden park that provides a quality outdoor recreation experience. Without proper funding the stewardship that has been the DNR's charge for our State Parks will only be further stressed. The Recreation Passport Fee provides a long term solution to a very real and ongoing problem. Without this funding State Parks will continue to deteriorate to a point where no amount of money can fix them.
- Currently, Michigan State Parks have an annual infrastructure improvement budget of \$2 million, which has proven to be wholly inadequate. Most of our buildings, water, and sewer systems are 40-50 years old and in a state of disrepair. For example, the 2008 bridge collapse at Warren Dunes will cost more than \$1 million to repair, and if not addressed could cost the revenue dependent system nearly \$650,000 in lost revenue annually. The 2009 collapse of the Interpretive Center at Ludington will keep it closed indefinitely due to lack of replacement funds. Virtually all state park infrastructure funds are used for emergency repairs. Passage of these bills could provide \$17 million annually for preventative maintenance, emergency repair and replacement.
- Visitors to Michigan's State Parks provide an economic impact on a daily basis. The 22 million annual visitors to our state parks generate \$650 million annually in the local economy. This economic impact is felt by communities big and small from the Keweenaw Peninsula to Warren Dunes.
- Michigan is a destination state, with many of our communities depending heavily on outdoor recreation tourism for their livelihood. For tourism to be a vital part of Michigan's diversifying economy, it is our responsibility to attract visitors with safe, functional and interesting facilities - from modern toilets to well maintained trails.
- More importantly, tourism destinations and activities like camping, fishing, swimming, downhill skiing or snowmobiling, and the jobs they create, will never be relocated or outsourced out of the state. As such, any investment made in expanding and improving the tourism product will always strengthen that state's economy, because those jobs stay put.
- Michigan state parks and forest lands are important natural assets to the state. They provide low-cost, high quality outdoor recreation opportunities for Michigan's citizens and visitors, from boating access sites to outdoor exploration programs for kids. Additionally, the state parks and forests contain some of the state's most valuable natural features that deserve protection for the enjoyment of future generations.
- Tourism is the third highest contributor to Michigan's economy, with outdoor recreation accounting for nearly 41% of travelers' reason for staying.
- People must have a reason to come to Michigan; it is a destination not a "drive through" state.
- State parks, forest and boating access sites, as well as local parks must be attractive destinations. Roads are the means to access a destination, so becoming an attractive destination will go hand in hand with improvement of the transportation system; it is not an either/or thing.